

PIGEON SPRING WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 3,575 acres

The Pigeon Spring Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-060-350) lies along the California border about ten miles west of Lida, Nevada. This 3,575 acre WSA is contiguous to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) WSA, No. 111, Sylvania Mountains. The WSA includes 3,575 acres of public land with no privately owned inholdings.

The boundary of the Pigeon Spring WSA roughly follows the Cucomunga Canyon road and a spur road on the east and southeast, the California border on the west, and roughly parallels the Sylvania Canyon road on the north. The Pigeon Spring WSA is irregularly shaped, measuring approximately two and one-half miles north to south and three and one-half miles east to west at the widest points.

There were two alternatives analyzed in the EIS: An all wilderness alternative and a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 3,575 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 3,575 acres for uses other than wilderness. All wilderness is considered the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term. Although the recommendation is not the all wilderness alternative, the recommendation for this WSA would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The Pigeon Spring WSA was recommended for uses other than wilderness because it does not meet the wilderness criteria for size, solitude, and primitive recreation except when considered in conjunction with the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) WSA, Sylvania Mountains. However, the CDCA plan has recommended that the Sylvania Mountains WSA not be designated as wilderness.

Even if the contiguous Sylvania Mountains WSA had been recommended for wilderness, this WSA would not have been recommended for wilderness due to the high mineral potential. The entire 3,575 acres of the Pigeon Springs WSA have a high potential for metallic minerals such as gold, silver, molybdenum, tungsten, lead and zinc. If this WSA is not designated wilderness, mineral exploration and development will have the greatest adverse impact on wilderness values, in all parts of the WSA, due to the high potential for metallic minerals. The Pigeon Springs WSA has a low potential for nonmetallic minerals and geothermal resources.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Pigeon Spring WSA is generally in a natural state. The WSA contains the upper drainages of Cucomunga Canyon in the Sylvania Mountains. The central feature is one and one-half miles of a steep-walled canyon that continues on to the California side. Vegetation consists of a pinyon pine and juniper woodland throughout. There are no springs or streams within the WSA. Elevations vary from 6,400 to 8,160 feet. Naturalness is impaired within one mile of the south and east boundaries by several short ways associated with the mining interest and the accessibility of the relatively level terrain on the periphery of the WSA.

B. Solitude: The Pigeon Spring WSA does not provide an outstanding opportunity for solitude. The Nevada portion of this WSA is too small to offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Topographic screening is outstanding in the rugged main canyon and along the main ridge which parallels the California-Nevada border. Dense pinyon and juniper stands offer vegetative screening along this ridge. The broader drainages and less steep terrain of the remainder of the WSA do not offer outstanding screening. Although some of the north and east slopes in this area do have dense pinyon and juniper cover, the majority is lightly forested.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The Pigeon Spring WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The area is too small to be suitable for hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, mountain or rock climbing, or sightseeing.

D. Special Features: There are no known special features in this WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The easily accessible terrain and close proximity to extensive mining activity would make the Pigeon Spring WSA difficult to manage. The WSA has two types of management problems: mining claims and the potential for indiscriminate vehicle use. Mining claims, covering nearly one sixth of the area, are scattered over the WSA. Since the entire WSA is rated as having a high potential for metallic minerals, some of these claims will probably prove valid and be developed. Because the WSA is so small, any mineral development would affect the wilderness values of the WSA as a whole. Several ways, resulting from mineral exploration or off-road vehicle use, penetrate the Pigeon Spring WSA along the Cucomunga canyon road. There are no natural barriers to vehicle travel in this part of the WSA. Closing these ways and controlling recreational vehicle use will be difficult and require constant patrolling.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL VALUES

The Pigeon Spring WSA contains 720 acres of mining claims. There are no oil and gas or geothermal leases. Leasable mineral potential is low for oil and gas and for geothermal resources.

The entire WSA has a high potential for metallic resources such as gold, silver, molybdenum, tungsten, lead, and zinc. Mineral exploration for metallic minerals is projected to occur within the WSA as metal prices move upward. Exploration of existing mining claims could involve the drilling of up to ten holes per year, disturbing five acres per hole, or 500 acres over a ten year period. A track mounted drill rig would cross one mile of the study area or two acres per hole. Total surface disturbance from exploration would be 700 acres over a ten year period.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Eight comments were received during the initial inventory in 1979. Five agreed with further study of the area and three disagreed. Ten specific comments on the WSA and 2,327 general comments, stating the unit meet wilderness criteria, were received during the intensive inventory in 1980.

Several of the specific comments discussed the presents of wilderness values and supplemental values but most cited surrounding roads, intrusions and lack of wilderness characteristics. Four mineral and energy companies stated the WSA was highly mineralized and adjacent to operating mines and known mineral districts.

No specific comments were received on this WSA during the issue identification stage for the RMP. Three general comments were opposed to any wilderness in the Esmeralda-Southern Nye RMP area.

Public hearings were held in Pahrump, Goldfield and Las Vegas, Nevada. During the public hearing and comment period, a total of 17 comments were received, six supported more wilderness than the Preferred Alternative and eleven supported the Preferred Alternative. No local government or Federal agency commented on this WSA. The State, during the consistency review, concurred with the Preferred Alternative.